



Chen Zuwei, Liang Wentao (ed.), *Zhengzhi lilun zai Zhongguo* (Political Theory in China)

Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 2001, 404 p.

Carl K. Y. Shaw



Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/834>

ISSN : 1996-4617

Éditeur

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 juillet 2004

ISSN : 2070-3449

Référence électronique

Carl K. Y. Shaw, « Chen Zuwei, Liang Wentao (ed.), *Zhengzhi lilun zai Zhongguo* (Political Theory in China) », *China Perspectives* [En ligne], 54 | July- August 2004, mis en ligne le 21 juin 2007, consulté le 28 octobre 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/834>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 28 octobre 2019.

© All rights reserved

Chen Zuwei, Liang Wentao (ed.), *Zhengzhi lilun zai Zhongguo* (Political Theory in China)

Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 2001, 404 p.

Carl K. Y. Shaw

- 1 The objective of political theory is to reflect political values, and it must be contextualised in the particular society to which theorists belong. The 15 articles in this anthology reflect the spectrum of the concerns of the younger generation of political theorists from three Chinese societies: China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Most authors have academic training in Western countries. The quality of these works, though still variable for each individual article, deserves praise. No reader interested in the normative issues in Chinese societies would be disappointed after perusing this book.
- 2 The essays are grouped according to thematic orientations: the contemporary relevance of Confucianism; liberalism, Marxism and socialism; and civil society. After two introductory essays, four articles elaborate Confucian values for contemporary society. As none of the authors belong to the neo-Confucian school, it makes their analyses interesting and communicable with other disciplines. Two essays adopt the methodology meta-ethics of analytical philosophy to explore the possibility of integrating Western ideas of moral autonomy with Confucianism and of establishing a Confucian discourse of human rights. Although two authors arrive at conflicting conclusions (pp. 90-93, pp. 111-112), their analyses are novel and cogent. The other two essays deploy the Weberian concept of legitimacy and German *Begriffsgeschichte* to analyse the Confucian political values. Interestingly, three out of four authors of this group are from Hong Kong, one from Taiwan. No mainland Chinese scholars participate in this lively debate, such that readers may well wonder how the Chinese mindset would articulate the issue.
- 3 The next four articles discuss the prospects of liberal traditions in different societies. Two authors from China, two from Taiwan, address the issue to reveal a clear contrast.

In Taiwan, liberalism has undergone a dramatic change: from the most cherished political values under the authoritarian regime, to nationalistic and postmodernist values following democratisation. How to revive liberal values in a democratised society is the core concern for Taiwan's liberals. China, on the contrary, has become neither fully liberalised nor democratised. One can sense a very subtle discursive strategy on the part of Chinese liberals. Emphasis is on the belief that liberalism would sit well in a strong yet neutral state for effective governance. John Rawls is characterised as the representative of this "left liberalism". Indeed, both authors argue that well-delineated functions of state power constitute the prerequisite for effective governance for the Chinese government in transition. Thus, the separation of powers and the separation between civil society and state, two core liberal values, are presented in a way that can be accommodated in the current situation of Chinese governance and public discourse. The differences between Chinese and Taiwanese liberals illuminate subtle strategies with regard to the political development of their societies.

- 4 Three articles on the Chinese reform agenda are not by Chinese scholars but by Hong Kong scholars. All three articles emphasise the limit of socialist reform without corresponding theoretical or ideological innovation. The literature of market socialism, especially the works of David Miller and Michael Walzer may pave a new ground for normative reconstruction of socialist ideology.
- 5 The last three articles constitute the most balanced and coherent group in this anthology. Each traces the development of civil society in three localities. These are governance (China), social movements (Taiwan), and societal organizations (Hong Kong) respectively. Historical overview paired with theoretical reflections makes it possible for readers to understand the different characteristics of emerging civil societies.
- 6 Despite a well-designed framework and overall the fine scholarly quality of most of the articles, there is one obvious thematic lacuna: the issue of nationalism. Neither the rise of "new nationalism" in China during the last decade nor the thorny issue of "national identity" in Taiwan garnered discussion. Thorough preparation and coordination are needed to truly realise the potential for such a conference in the future. Hopefully, political theorists can freely discuss the socialist transition in China, democratisation and national identity in Taiwan, and the prospects for "one country, two systems" in Hong Kong. Not until then will there be Chinese political theories in a genuine sense.